



PRESS RELEASE
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For Immediate Release

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FIVE INDICTED ON COCAINE SMUGGLING CHARGES,
TWO AND ONE HALF TONS OF COCAINE SEIZED

U. S. Attorney Paul I. Perez announced today the indictment of five Colombian citizens on charges of conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute cocaine and possession with the intent to distribute cocaine. The five defendants are: Jairo Abel, Howard Duffis Claudio, Abdon Fulvio, Mario Alejandro, and Peter Steele Demetrio. If convicted, each defendant faces ten years' imprisonment up to life imprisonment. All five defendants were arrested on June 17, 2003 aboard a go-fast boat in the southern Caribbean Ocean. They are scheduled to appear in federal court this afternoon.

On June 17, 2003 the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Venturous was on patrol in the southern Caribbean Ocean. The Coast Guard was able to stop the go-fast boat, detain the crew of five, and recover 79 bales of cocaine weighing two and one half tons.

This investigation is part of Operation Panama Express which is a joint effort between the U.S. Navy, U. S. Coast Guard, The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), The Federal Bureau of

Investigation (FBI) and the U.S. Marshals Service. This case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Jim Preston of the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) in the Middle District of Florida.

An indictment is merely a formal charge that a defendant has committed a violation of the federal criminal laws, and every defendant is presumed innocent unless, and until, proven guilty.